



## Old South Leaflets.

No. 175.

# Longfellow Memorial.

FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY, APRIL 13, 1882.

The Vice-President, Dr. George E. Ellis, announced the death of Mr. Longfellow, as follows:—

Much to our regret we miss our honored President from his chair to-day, on this the ninety-first annual meeting of the Society. It is gratifying to be assured that he has safely reached the other side of the ocean, and may be looked for with us again early in the autumn. It will be remembered that in opening the last meeting he expressed for us all the relief which he found in not being called upon, as in such rapid and melancholy succession he had been at so many previous meetings, to announce a loss from our limited roll of associates. But again must there be stricken from it the name of one who leaves upon the list no other so enshrined in the affection, the grateful homage, we may even say the venerating regard, of the world-wide fellowship of civilized humanity.

On the announcement to our deeply moved community of the death of Mr. Longfellow, though I had taken leave of Mr. Winthrop near the eve of his departure, I wrote to him asking that he would commit to me, to be read here and now, what he would himself have said if he were to be with us to-day. In his brief note of reply he writes: "How gladly would I comply with your suggestion, and send you, for the next meeting of our Society, some little tribute to our lamented Longfellow! But, at this last hurried moment before leaving home, I could do justice neither to him nor to myself. I was just going out to

bid him good-by, when his serious illness was announced, and in a day or two more all was over. The last time he was in Europe I was there with him, and I was a witness to not a few of the honors which he received from high and low. I remember particularly that when we were coming away from the House of Lords together, where we had been hearing a fine speech from his friend the Duke of Argyll, a group of the common people gathered around our carriage, calling him by name, begging to touch his hand, and at least one of them reciting aloud one of his most familiar poems. No poet of our day has touched the common heart like Longfellow. The simplicity and purity of his style were a part of his own character. He had nothing of that irritability which is one of the proverbial elements of the poetic temperament, but was always genial, generous, lovely." I will not attempt to add anything, as tribute, to that heart utterance from our President. Indeed, it would be difficult to find variations in the terms of language even, much more in the sentiments to be expressed by them, in tributes of tender and appreciative regard and affection for Mr. Longfellow. Full and profound in depth and earnestness have been the honors to him in speech and print; richer still, because unutterable, and only for the privacy of those who cherish them, are the responsive silences of the heart.

It is fitting, however, that we put on record our recognition of Mr. Longfellow in his relations to this Society. He accepted the membership to which he had been elected in December, 1857. Those who were associates in it twenty-five years ago will recall two signal occasions delightfully associated with his presence and speech. The one was a special meeting, to which he invited the Society at his own residence, as Washington's headquarters, in Cambridge, on June 17, 1858. There was much of charming and instructive interest in the scenes and associations of the occasion, added to the communications made by several members full of historic information freshly related from original sources. The host himself was silent, save as by his genial greeting and warm hospitality he welcomed his grateful guests. The other marked occasion was also at a special meeting of the Society, held in December, 1859, at the house of our associate, Mr. Sears. The meeting was devoted to tributes of respect and affection for Washington Irving, from many who had shared his most intimate friendship. Mr. Longfellow gave hearty



and delicate expression to his regard for Irving, while Everett, Felton, Colonel Aspinwall, G. Sumner, and Dr. Holmes contributed their offerings to the memory of that admired author. But few of our associates, in its nearly a century of years, can have studied our local and even national history more sedulously than did Mr. Longfellow. And but fewer still among us can have found in its stern and rugged and homely actors and annals so much that could be graced and softened by rich and delicate fancies, by refining sentiments, and the hues and fragrance of simple poetry. He took the saddest of our New England tragedies and the sweetest of its rural home scenes, the wayside inn, the alarum of war, the Indian legend, and the hanging of the crane in the modest household, and his genius has invested them with enduring charms and morals. Wise and gentle was the heart which could thus find melodies for the harp, the lyre, and the plectrum in our fields and wildernesses, wreathing them as nature does the thickets and stumps of the forest with flowers and mosses. While all his utterances came from a pure, a tender, and a devout heart, addressing themselves to what is of like in other hearts, there is not in them a line of morbidness, of depression, or melancholy, but only that which quickens and cheers with robust resolve and courage, with peace and aspiring trust. He has, indeed, used freely the poet's license in playful freedom with dates and facts. But the scenes and incidents and personages which most need a softening and refining touch receive it from him without prejudice to the service of sober history.

Dr. Ellis closed his remarks by offering the following Resolution:—

*Resolved*, That, in yielding from our roll the name of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, we would put on our records the expression of our profoundest regard, esteem, and admiring appreciation of his character and genius, and our grateful sense of the honor and satisfaction we have shared in his companionship.

The Resolution was seconded by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who addressed the Society with much feeling, as follows:—

It is with no vain lamentations, but rather with profound gratitude that we follow the soul of our much-loved and long-loved poet beyond the confines of the world he helped so largely



to make beautiful. We could have wished to keep him longer, but at least we were spared witnessing the inevitable shadows of an old age protracted too far beyond its natural limits. From the first notes of his fluent and harmonious song to the last, which comes to us as the "voice fell like a falling star," there has never been a discord. The music of the mountain stream, in the poem which reaches us from the other shore of being, is as clear and sweet as the melodies of the youthful and middle periods of his minstrelsy. It has been a fully rounded life, beginning early with large promise, equalling every anticipation in its maturity, fertile and beautiful to its close in the ripeness of its well-filled years.

Until the silence fell upon us we did not entirely appreciate how largely his voice was repeated in the echoes of our own hearts. The affluence of his production so accustomed us to look for a poem from him at short intervals that we could hardly feel how precious that was which was so abundant. Not, of course, that every single poem reached the standard of the highest among them all. That could not be in Homer's time, and mortals must occasionally nod now as then. But the hand of the artist shows itself unmistakably in everything which left his desk. The O of Giotto could not help being a perfect round, and the verse of Longfellow is always perfect in construction.

He worked in that simple and natural way which characterizes the master. But it is one thing to be simple through poverty of intellect, and another thing to be simple by repression of all redundancy and overstatement; one thing to be natural through ignorance of all rules, and another to have made a second nature out of the sovereign rules of art. In respect of this simplicity and naturalness, his style is in strong contrast to that of many writers of our time. There is no straining for effect, there is no torturing of rhythm for novel patterns, no wearisome iteration of petted words, no inelegant clipping of syllables to meet the exigencies of a verse; no affected archaism, rarely any liberty taken with language, unless it may be in the form of a few words in the translation of Dante. I will not except from these remarks the singular and original form which he gave to his poem of "Hiawatha,"—a poem with a curious history in many respects. Suddenly and immensely popular in this country, greatly admired by many foreign critics, imitated with perfect ease by any clever school-boy, serving as a model for metrical advertisements, made fun of, sneered at, abused, admired, but, at any rate, a

picture full of pleasing fancies and melodious cadences. The very names are jewels which the most fastidious muse might be proud to wear. Coming from the realm of the Androscoggin and of Moosetukmaguntuk, how could he have found two such delicious names as Hiawatha and Minnehaha? The eight-syllable trochaic verse of "Hiawatha," like the eight-syllable iambic verse of "The Lady of the Lake," and others of Scott's poems, has a fatal facility, which I have elsewhere endeavored to explain on physiological principles. The recital of each line uses up the air of one natural expiration, so that we read, as we naturally do, eighteen or twenty lines in a minute, without disturbing the normal rhythm of breathing, which is also eighteen or twenty breaths to the minute. The standing objection to this is that it makes the octo-syllabic verse too easy writing and too slipshod reading. Yet in this most frequently criticised composition the poet has shown a subtle sense of the requirements of his simple story of a primitive race, in choosing the most fluid of measures, that lets the thought run through it in easy sing-song, such as oral tradition would be sure to find on the lips of the story-tellers of the wigwam. Although Longfellow was not fond of metrical contortions and acrobatic achievements, he well knew the effects of skilful variation in the forms of verse and well-managed refrains or repetitions. In one of his very earliest poems,—*"Pleasant it was when Woods were Green,"*—the dropping a syllable from the last line is an agreeable surprise to the ear, expecting only the common monotony of scrupulously balanced lines. In *"Excelsior"* the repetition of the aspiring exclamation which gives its name to the poem lifts every stanza a step higher than the one which preceded it. In the *"Old Clock on the Stair,"* the solemn words, *"Forever, never, never, forever,"* give wonderful effectiveness to that most impressive poem.

All his art, all his learning, all his melody, cannot account for his extraordinary popularity, not only among his own countrymen and those who in other lands speak the language in which he wrote, but in foreign realms, where he could only be read through the ground glass of a translation. It was in his choice of subjects that one source of the public favor with which his writings, more especially his poems, were received, obviously lay. A poem, to be widely popular, must deal with thoughts and emotions that belong to common, not exceptional character, conditions, interests. The most popular of all books are those which meet

the spiritual needs of mankind most powerfully, such works as "The Imitation of Christ" and "Pilgrim's Progress." I suppose if the great multitude of readers were to render a decision as to which of Longfellow's poems they most valued, the "Psalm of Life" would command the largest number. This is a brief homily enforcing the great truths of duty, and of our relation to the unseen world. Next in order would very probably come "Excelsior," a poem that springs upward like a flame and carries the soul up with it in its aspiration for the unattainable ideal. If this sounds like a trumpet-call to the fiery energies of youth, not less does the still small voice of that most sweet and tender poem, "Resignation," appeal to the sensibilities of those who have lived long enough to have known the bitterness of such a bereavement as that out of which grew the poem. Or take a poem before referred to, "The Old Clock on the Stair," and in it we find the history of innumerable households told in relating the history of one, and the solemn burden of the song repeats itself to thousands of listening readers, as if the beat of the pendulum were throbbing at the head of every staircase. Such poems as these—and there are many more of not unlike character—are the foundation of that universal acceptance his writings obtain among all classes. But for these appeals to universal sentiment, his readers would have been confined to a comparatively small circle of educated and refined readers. There are thousands and tens of thousands who are familiar with what we might call his household poems who have never read "The Spanish Student," "The Golden Legend," "Hiawatha," or even "Evangeline." Again, ask the first school-boy you meet which of Longfellow's poems he likes best, and he will be very likely to answer, "Paul Revere's Ride." When he is a few years older, he might perhaps say, "The Building of the Ship," that admirably constructed poem, beginning with the literal description, passing into the higher region of sentiment by the most natural of transitions, and ending with the noble climax,—

"Thou, too, sail on, O ship of state,"

which has become the classical expression of patriotic emotion.

Nothing lasts like a coin and a lyric. Long after the dwellings of men have disappeared, when their temples are in ruins and all their works of art are shattered, the ploughman strikes an earthen vessel holding the golden and silver disks, on which the features of a dead monarch, with emblems, it may be, be-



traying the beliefs or the manners, the rudeness or the finish of art and all which this implies, survive an extinct civilization. Pope has expressed this with his usual Horatian felicity, in the letter to Addison, on the publication of his little "Treatise on Coins,"—

"A small Euphrates through the piece is rolled,  
And little eagles wave their wings in gold."

Conquerors and conquered sink in common oblivion; triumphal arches, pageants the world wonders at, all that trumpeted itself as destined to an earthly immortality, pass away; the victor of a hundred battles is dust; the parchments or papyrus on which his deeds were written are shrivelled and decayed and gone,—

"And all his triumphs shrink into a coin."

So it is with a lyric poem. One happy utterance of some emotion or expression, which comes home to all, may keep a name remembered when the race to which the singer belonged is lost sight of. The cradle-song of Danaë to her infant as they tossed on the waves in the imprisoning chest has made the name of Simonides immortal. Our own English literature abounds with instances which illustrate the same fact so far as the experience of a few generations extends. And I think we may venture to say that some of the shorter poems of Longfellow must surely reach a remote posterity, and be considered then, as now, ornaments to English literature. We may compare them with the best short poems of the language without fearing that they will suffer. Scott, cheerful, wholesome, unreflective, should be read in the open air; Byron, the poet of malcontents and cynics, in a prison cell; Burns, generous, impassioned, manly, social, in the tavern hall; Moore, elegant, fastidious, full of melody, scented with the volatile perfume of the Eastern gardens, in which his fancy revelled, is pre-eminently the poet of the drawing-room and the piano; Longfellow, thoughtful, musical, home-loving, busy with the lessons of life, which he was ever studying, and loved to teach others, finds his charmed circle of listeners by the fireside. His songs, which we might almost call sacred ones, rarely if ever get into the hymn-books. They are too broadly human to suit the specialized tastes of the sects, which often think more of their differences from each other than of the common ground on which they can agree. Shall we think less of our poet because he so frequently aimed in his verse not

simply to please, but also to impress some elevating thought on the minds of his readers? The Psalms of King David are burning with religious devotion and full of weighty counsel, but they are not less valued, certainly, than the poems of Omar Khayam, which cannot be accused of too great a tendency to find a useful lesson in their subject. Dennis, the famous critic, found fault with "The Rape of the Lock," because it had no moral. It is not necessary that a poem should carry a moral, any more than that a picture of a Madonna should always be an altar-piece. The poet himself is the best judge of that in each particular case. In that charming little poem of Wordsworth's, ending,

"And then my heart with rapture thrills  
And dances with the daffodils,"

we do not ask for anything more than the record of the impression which is told so simply, and which justifies itself by the way in which it is told. But who does not feel with the poet that the touching story, "Hartleap Well," must have its lesson brought out distinctly, to give a fitting close to the narrative? Who would omit those two lines?—

"Never to blend our pleasure or our pride  
With sorrow of the meanest thing that lives."

No poet knew better than Longfellow how to impress a moral without seeming to preach. Didactic verse, as such, is, no doubt, a formidable visitation, but a cathedral has its lesson to teach as well as a school-house. These beautiful medallions of verse which Longfellow has left us might possibly be found fault with as conveying too much useful and elevating truth in their legends; having the unartistic aim of being serviceable as well as delighting by their beauty. Let us leave such comment to the critics who cannot handle a golden coin, fresh from the royal mint, without clipping its edges and stamping their own initials on its face.

Of the longer poems of our chief singer, I should not hesitate to select "Evangeline" as the masterpiece, and I think the general verdict of opinion would confirm my choice. The German model which it follows in its measure and the character of its story was itself suggested by an earlier idyl. If Dorothea was the mother of Evangeline, Luise was the mother of Dorothea. And what a beautiful creation is the Acadian maiden! From the first line of the poem, from its first words, we read as we would



float down a broad and placid river, murmuring softly against its banks, heaven over it, and the glory of the unspoiled wilderness all around,—

“This is the forest primeval.”

The words are already as familiar as

“*Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά,*

or

“*Arma virumque cano.*”

The hexameter has been often criticised, but I do not believe any other measure could have told that lovely story with such effect, as we feel when carried along the tranquil current of these brimming, slow-moving, soul-satisfying lines. Imagine for one moment a story like this minced into octo-syllabics. The poet knows better than his critics the length of step which best befits his muse.

I will not take up your time with any further remarks upon writings so well known to all. By the poem I have last mentioned, and by his lyrics, or shorter poems, I think the name of Longfellow will be longest remembered. Whatever he wrote, whether in prose or poetry, bore always the marks of the finest scholarship, the purest taste, fertile imagination, a sense of the music of words, and a skill in bringing it out of our English tongue, which hardly more than one of his contemporaries who write in that language can be said to equal.

The saying of Buffon, that the style is the man himself, or of the man himself, as some versions have it, was never truer than in the case of our beloved poet. Let us understand by style all that gives individuality to the expression of a writer; and in the subjects, the handling, the spirit and aim of his poems, we see the reflex of a personal character which made him worthy of that almost unparalleled homage which crowned his noble life. Such a funeral procession as attended him in thought to his resting-place has never joined the train of mourners that followed the hearse of a poet,— could we not say of any private citizen? And we all feel that no tribute could be too generous, too universal, to the union of a divine gift with one of the loveliest of human characters.

Dr. Holmes was followed by Professor Charles E. Norton, who said:—

I could wish that this were a silent meeting. There is no need of formal commemorative speech to-day, for all the people of the land, the whole English-speaking race,—and not they alone,—mourn our friend and poet. Never was poet so mourned, for never was poet so beloved.

There is nothing of lamentation in our mourning. He has not been untimely taken. His life was “prolonged with many years, happy and famous.” Death came to him in good season, or ever the golden bowl was broken, or the pitcher broken at the cistern. Desire had but lately failed. Life was fair to him almost to its end. On his seventy-fourth birthday, a little more than a year ago, with his family and a few friends round his dinner table, he said, “There seems to me a mistake in the order of the years: I can hardly believe that the four should not precede the seven.” But in the year that followed he experienced the pains and languor and weariness of age. There was no complaint—the sweetness of his nature was invincible.

On one of the last times that I saw him, as I entered his familiar study on a beautiful afternoon of this past winter, I said to him, “I hope this is a good day for you?” He replied, with a pleasant smile, “Ah! there are no good days now.” Happily the evil days were not to be many.

The accord between the character and life of Mr. Longfellow and his poems was complete. His poetry touched the hearts of his readers because it was the sincere expression of his own. The sweetness, the gentleness, the grace; the purity of his verse were the image of his own soul. But, beautiful and ample as this expression of himself was, it fell short of the truth. The man was more and better than the poet.

Intimate, however, as was the concord between the poet and his poetry, there was much in him to which he never gave utterance in words. He was a man of deep reserves. He kept the holy of holies within himself inviolable and secluded. Seldom does he admit his readers even to its outward precincts. The deepest experiences of life are not to be shared with any one whatsoever. “There are things of which I may not speak,” he says in one of the most personal of his poems.

“Whose hand shall dare to open and explore  
Those volumes closed and clasped forevermore?  
Not mine. With reverential feet I pass.”

It was the felicity of Mr. Longfellow to share the sentiment and emotion of his coevals, and to succeed in giving to them their apt poetic expression. It was not by depth of thought or by original views of nature that he won his place in the world's regard; but it was by sympathy with the feelings common to good men and women everywhere, and by the simple, direct, sincere, and delicate expression of them, that he gained the affection of mankind.

He was fortunate in the time of his birth. He grew up in the morning of our republic. He shared in the cheerfulness of the early hour, in its hopefulness, its confidence. The years of his youth and early manhood coincided with an exceptional moment of national life, in which a prosperous and unembarrassed democracy was learning its own capacities, and was beginning to realize its large and novel resources; in which the order of society was still simple and humane. He became, more than any one else, the voice of this epoch of national progress, an epoch of unexampled prosperity for the masses of mankind in our new world, prosperity from which sprang a sense, more general and deeper than had ever before been felt, of human kindness and brotherhood. But, even to the prosperous, life brings its inevitable burden. Trial, sorrow, misfortune, are not to be escaped by the happiest of men. The deepest experiences of each individual are the experiences common to the whole race. And it is this double aspect of American life—its novel and happy conditions, with the genial spirit resulting from them, and, at the same time, its subjection to the old, absolute, universal laws of existence—that finds its mirror and manifestation in Longfellow's poetry.

No one can read his poetry without a conviction of the simplicity, tenderness, and humanity of the poet. And we who were his friends know how these qualities shone in his daily conversation. Praise, applause, flattery,—and no man ever was exposed to more of them,—never touched him to harm him. He walked through their flames unscathed, as Dante through the fires of purgatory. His modesty was perfect. He accepted the praise as he would have accepted any other pleasant gift,—glad of it as an expression of good will, but without personal elation. Indeed, he had too much of it, and often in an absurd form, not to become at times weary of what his own fame and virtues brought upon him. But his kindliness did not permit him to show his weariness to those who did but burden him



with their admiration. It was the penalty of his genius, and he accepted it with the pleasantest temper and a humorous resignation. Bores of all nations, especially of our own, persecuted him. His long-suffering patience was a wonder to his friends. It was, in truth, the sweetest charity. No man was ever before so kind to those moral mendicants. One day I ventured to remonstrate with him on his endurance of the persecutions of one of the worst of the class, who to lack of modesty added lack of honesty,—a wretched creature,—and, when I had done, he looked at me with an amused expression, and half deprecatingly replied, “But, Charles, who would be kind to him if I were not?” It was enough. He was helped by a gift of humor, which, though seldom displayed in his poems, lighted up his talk and added a charm to his intercourse. He was the most gracious of men in his own home; he was fond of the society of his friends, and the company that gathered in his study or round his table took its tone from his own genial, liberal, cultivated, and refined nature.

“With loving breath of all the winds his name  
Is blown about the world; but to his friends  
A sweeter secret hides behind his fame,  
And love steals shyly through the loud acclaim  
To murmur a *God bless you!* and there ends.”

His verse, his fame, are henceforth the precious possessions of the people whom he loved so well. They will be among the effective instruments in shaping the future character of the nation. His spirit will continue to soften, to refine, to elevate the hearts of men. He will be the beloved friend of future generations as he has been of his own. His desire will be gratified:—

“And in your life let my remembrance linger,  
As something not to trouble and disturb it,  
But to complete it, adding life to life.  
And if at times beside the evening fire  
You see my face among the other faces,  
Let it not be regarded as a ghost  
That haunts your house, but as a guest that loves you,  
Nay, even as one of your own family,  
Without whose presence there were something wanting.  
I have no more to say.”

Mr. William Everett spoke with much force of the pre-eminent gifts of Mr. Longfellow, and, although not given to comparisons, he could not help putting his “Ship of State”

alongside of Horace's passionate burst of song beginning "O navis!" After reciting the two, Mr. Everett declared that our singer had encountered the greatest lyric poet of Rome on his own ground, and, grappling with him, had fairly thrown him.

The Resolution was unanimously adopted by a standing vote.

FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY, FEB. 14, 1907.

This meeting of the Historical Society, coming in the month of the centenary of the birth of Longfellow, was also made in a measure a memorial meeting, with appropriate remarks by the President, Charles Francis Adams, by T. W. Higginson, Charles Eliot Norton, William R. Thayer, Bliss Perry, William W. Goodwin, Samuel A. Green, and Franklin B. Sanborn. Mr. Thayer spoke as follows upon Longfellow as our national poet:—

Every year that passes makes it more evident that Longfellow has come to be the American national poet in much the same sense that Burns is the Scotch national poet. We have drawn far enough away from him and his contemporaries to be able to see clearly that he possesses the national quality to a degree to which none of the others attained. Bryant, Whittier, Emerson, and Lowell had patriotism and the moral outlook in common with him; Bryant and Lowell, like Longfellow, dipped occasionally into European sources; Whittier, like Longfellow, immortalized some of our local or national events; all loved Nature, all observed her accurately and described her sympathetically,—Nature as she reveals herself to a New Englander. But, if you compare their work with his, you will perceive that Longfellow has a representative character which they lack, and a certain something which recommends him to a larger variety of tastes than they can satisfy.

Numbers predicate nothing, of course, as to merit. So the charge used to be made, and one hears it still, that Longfellow owed his immense popularity to his commonplaceness. But the true deduction to be made from his popularity leads in the other direction. Longfellow is popular, not because of his commonplaceness,—but because of his art, which has raised millions of his readers above the commonplace. The same domestic sentiment, the same moral precept, the same patriotic desire, had been expressed, it may be, many times: he expressed it in the way peculiar to him—the way which added beauty or charm—and it became idealized to them, and his poetic description of it passed current as a household word. That is what I mean in calling him so much more widely representative than, let us say, Lowell or Whittier. Sixty thousand copies of "Evangeline" are reported to have been sold within

two months of its publication. Shall we argue from that a triumph of the commonplace, a riot of Philistinism? Far from it: those figures prove the genius of the poet who by his art—delicate and sincere art, sweet art, if ever there were such—could commend a poem of that excellence to so large a multitude of strangers. In other words, a potential appreciation of poetry is latent in a much wider circle than we commonly suppose. Longfellow struck a responsive chord in myriads who were dumb to other singers: that was because of his magic gift, not of his commonplaceness.

Numbers, let us repeat, give no hint as to excellence; and yet, when multitudes love a certain poet and keep on loving him after the bloom of novelty has worn off, the fact of numbers may mean a great deal. It may mean, for instance, that he has universality; that is, that he can describe some of the primal human concerns in such fashion that every one recognizes him as a true spokesman. Now this is exactly what Longfellow did: he uttered our American ideals in poetry which had a national flavor. Nothing could be more genuinely Yankee than Lowell's "Biglow Papers," nothing more unalloyedly Puritan than many of Whittier's poems, and yet the poetry of Lowell and Whittier is too strongly individualized, too obviously limited by the personal idiosyncrasy of each, ever to be national as Longfellow's poetry is national.

Longfellow sang not only the ideals of the Settlers and the Founders—Liberty, Independence, Union, and Democracy were still the national watchwords when he began to write, although Union was soon to be tested in the fiery furnace—but to them were being added others, not so much civic and political as social and individual. Our long isolation, which had permitted us to become Yankees instead of Englishmen and to be free instead of subjects of the British Crown, was being broken up. Immigration on a large scale had begun, and it was slowly to change the nature of our racial stock. The American, ceasing to be nine-tenths Anglo-Saxon, was becoming truly cosmopolitan. Henceforth Latin and Teuton, Scandinavian and Slav, must contribute their ingredients to the composite American character. Now Longfellow, beyond all other Americans, knew the spirit of those peoples through their literatures, and by translating many of their poems and by retelling many of their favorite stories he prepared the way for some sort of sympathetic meeting when the strangers began to pour into the United States. The service which he rendered to our culture by infusing into it strains from the Continental reservoirs has been freely acknowledged, but his even greater service as spokesman of the New American has been almost overlooked. That New American is by inheritance a cosmopolite; it required a poet of cosmopolitan culture and sympathy to be his spokesman. Here, again, Longfellow displays the trait of universality which makes him of all our poets the most accessible to our oldest and youngest citizens alike. We may well be grateful that our new populations can through him come to know our ideals of duty, service, dignity, courage, self sacrifice, kindness, friendship, affection,

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and patriotism; for it is, after all, on these primary virtues and affections that the character of man and nation must be built. This also stamps him as our national poet. . . .

Who shall compute the great gifts he brought us? He put into the finest ballads produced in America some typical episodes. He wrote not only the best sonnets ever written in America, but sonnets which are among the best in English. He made the best metrical translation of "The Divine Comedy." He wrote the epic of the Indian, which, though it may too much idealize its subject, will remain unapproached, for the time is past when that theme is likely to commend itself to a great poet. He embalmed in verse the life of the first settlers, the fortunes of the men of Plymouth, the tranquil joys and tragic end of the French at Acadie. He immortalized many a spot by pouring upon it the elixir of poetry. He commemorated friends whose lives have become a part of our history. He embodied the national ideals of the Settlers and of the Founders—those ideals which made us Yankees; he embodied also the ideals which are making the new generations cosmopolites—Americans in whom blend the traits of many races. Happy are we in such a national poet!

Mr. Adams, after paying high tribute to Longfellow as a poet,—“to my mind,” he said, “it is doubtful whether any other American writer has contributed to the innocent intellectual enjoyment of so many people in a degree at all comparable,”—proceeded to point out certain inaccuracies as to historic fact in “The Courtship of Miles Standish,” “The Rhyme of Sir Christopher,” and “Paul Revere’s Ride.” Touching the first, he repeated the following passage from an address which he gave before the Weymouth Historical Society a few years before, in which he had first quoted from the poem Longfellow’s account of Miles Standish’s march and conflict with the Indians at Wessagusset:—

We all recognize in these cases what is known as “poetic license.” It is the unquestioned privilege of the poet to so mould hard facts and actual conditions as to make realities conform to his idea of the everlasting fitness of things. On the other hand, it is but fair that, in so doing, the artist should improve on the facts. In other words, he should at least not make them more prosaic, and distinctly less dramatic, than they were. In the present case, I submit, Longfellow, instead of rendering things more poetic and dramatic, made them distinctly less so. This I shall now proceed to show.

And here let me premise that it was the habit of Longfellow, as I think the unfortunate habit, to improvise—so to speak, to evolve from his inner consciousness—the local atmosphere and conditions of those poems of his in which he dealt with history and historical happenings. It was so with “Paul Revere’s Ride”; it was so with

the episodes made use of in the "Tales of a Wayside Inn"; it is notorious it was so in the case of "Evangeline" and Acadia; it was strikingly, and far more inexcusably, so in the case of "Miles Standish" and Plymouth. While preparing a poem which has deservedly become an American classic, as such throwing a glamour of romance over that entire region to which it has given the name of the "Evangeline Country," Longfellow never sought to draw inspiration from actual contact with that "forest primeval" of which he sang; nor again, when dealing with the events of our own early history, did he once visit, much less study, the scene of that which he pictured. He imagined everything. I gravely question whether he even knew that the conflict he describes in the lines I have just quoted took place on the shores of Boston bay and at a point not twenty miles from the historic mansion in which he lived and the library where he imagined. He certainly, and more's the pity, never stood on King-oak Hill or sailed up the Fore River.

What actually occurred here in April, 1623, I have endeavored elsewhere to describe in detail, just as it appears in our early records. Those curious on the subject will find my narrative in a chapter (vi.) entitled "The Smoking Flax Blood-Quenched," in a work of mine, the matured outcome of my address here in 1874, called "Three Episodes of Massachusetts History." To that I refer them. Meanwhile, suffice it for me now to say, the actual occurrences of those early April days were stronger, more virile, and infinitely more dramatic and better adapted to poetic treatment,—in one word, more Homeric,—than the wholly apocryphal and somewhat mawkish cast given them in the lines I have quoted. Indeed, so far as the incidents drawn from the history of Weymouth are concerned, the whole is, in the original records, replete with vigorous life. It smacks of the savage; it is racy of the soil; it smells of the sea. It begins with the flight of Phineas Pratt from Wessagusset to Plymouth, his loss of the way, his fear lest his footprints in the late-lingering snow-banks should betray him, his nights in the woods, his pursuit by the Indians, his guidance by the stars and sky, his fording the icy river, and his arrival in Plymouth just as Miles Standish was embarking for Wessagusset. Nothing, then, can be more picturesque, more epic in outline, than Standish's voyage, with his little company of grim, silent men in that open boat. Sternly bent on action, they skirted, under a gloomy eastern sky, along the surf-beaten shore, the mist driving in their faces as the swelling seas broke roughly in white surge over the rocks and ledges which still obstruct the course they took. From the distance came the dull, monotonous roar of the breakers, indicating the line of the coast. At last they cast anchor before the desolate and apparently deserted block-house here in your Fore-river, and presently some woe-begone stragglers answered their call. Next came the meeting with the savages, the fencing talk, and the episode of what Holmes, in still another poem, refers to as

"Wituwamet's pictured knife  
And Pecksuot's whooping shout";

all closing with the fierce hand-to-hand death grapple on the blood-soaked, slippery floor of the rude stockade. Last of all the return to Plymouth, with the gory head of Wattawamat, "that bloody and bold villain," a ghastly freight, stowed in the rummage of their boat.

The whole story is, in the originals, full of life, simplicity and vigor, needing only to be turned into verse. But, in place of the voyage, we have in Longfellow's poem a march through the woods, which, having never taken place, has in it nothing characteristic; an interview before an Indian encampment "pitched on the edge of a meadow, between the sea and the forest," at which the knife scene is enacted, instead of in the rude block-house; and, finally, the killing takes place amid a discharge of firearms, and "there on the flowers of the meadow the warriors" are made to lie; whereas in fact they died far more vigorously, as well as poetically, on the bloody floor of the log house in which they were surprised, "not making any fearful noise, but catching at their weapons and striving to the last." And as for "flowers," it was early in April, and, in spots, the snow still lingered! That Longfellow wrote very sweet verse, none will deny; but, assuredly, he was not Homeric. At his hands your Weymouth history failed to have justice done it.

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The subject chosen for the Old South lectures for young people for 1907, the centennial of the births of Longfellow and Whittier, was "Boston History in the Boston Poets." Earlier in the year the service of Longfellow and Whittier for American history and life was made the theme of the annual course of Old South lectures for the Boston teachers. The use by all of our greater poets of subjects relating to our national history was very large. When we think, in Longfellow's case, of "The Song of Hiawatha," "The Courtship of Miles Standish," the "New England Tragedies," "Evangeline," so much in the "Wayside Inn," and the score of shorter works on similar themes, we see that nearly half of the total body of his poetry is of this character. Similarly we might refer to the poetry in the field of American history by Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, and Emerson, as well as to the important historical contributions in the prose works of all of these. The tributes paid to Longfellow by his fellow-members of the Massachusetts Historical Society at the meeting following his death, reprinted in the present leaflet, were a conspicuous recognition of the historical services of the poet; and these tributes were impressively supplemented by those at the meeting of the society in February, 1907, the centennial year, also noticed above. The student is referred to the similar tributes by the Historical Society to Emerson, Lowell, and Holmes, at the meetings following their deaths, accounts of which will be found in the society's Proceedings. The tributes to Longfellow by his fellow poets are well known, as are the various biographies, chief of which is that by his brother, Samuel Longfellow. The following passage from Edwin D. Mead's address on "Boston in the Boston Poets," at the celebration in December, 1906, of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Bostonian Society,—printed in the Proceedings of the Society,—while relating primarily to the services of the poets in the local field, touches also wider aspects of their historical work:—



"Emerson was born in Boston, most famous of all Boston boys save only Franklin. Holmes and Lowell were born in Cambridge. The fathers of all three were Puritan ministers, pastors of historic churches: William Emerson, of the First Church of Boston; Abiel Holmes, of the First Parish of Cambridge; Charles Lowell, of the West Church of Boston, over which he was settled just a hundred years ago this year, remaining nominally its pastor until his death in 1861, when his brilliant son and his fellow-singers were already at the zenith of their high poetic fame.

"The three fathers were all eminent scholars and eminent citizens. William Emerson was the Fourth of July orator at Faneuil Hall the year before his great son's birth. He wrote a *History of the First Church*; and his *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* was the precursor of the *North American Review*.

"Charles Lowell was a man of rare culture, who to his Harvard training had added, a very exceptional thing in those days, a course at the University of Edinburgh. He was three years in Europe; and Wilberforce and Dugald Stewart were among his friends. He belonged to various learned societies in Europe as well as in America; and his devotion to historical studies was signal. Like William Emerson and Abiel Holmes, he was a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society; and for thirty years he served the society either as its recording or corresponding secretary—which latter office Abiel Holmes also filled for the twenty years immediately preceding Dr. Lowell's occupancy. The present spacious West Church edifice was built to accommodate the 'flood-tide of would-be parishioners' which set toward Lynde Street immediately after Lowell's ordination, and he had 'probably the largest congregation in Boston.' Dr. Andrew P. Peabody, who knew him well, paid this high tribute to him: 'Dr. Lowell was, even as compared with Buckminster, Everett, and Channing, by far the greatest pulpit orator in Boston, and for prompt, continuous, uniform, and intense impression, in behalf of fundamental Christian truth and duty, on persons of all varieties of age, culture, condition, and character, I have never seen or heard his equal, nor can I imagine his superior.'

"Abiel Holmes's contributions to history were more important than either Charles Lowell's or William Emerson's. These were both Harvard men; Holmes was a graduate of Yale, married the daughter of President Stiles, and wrote Stiles's biography. In 1817 he delivered a course of lectures on ecclesiastical history, with special reference to New England; but by far the most important of his works—the titles of his various publications, chiefly sermons, fill two pages in the Historical Society's Collections—was his learned 'Annals of America,' so rich in matter interesting to us here.

"If, with such fathers and bred in such environment, Emerson, Holmes, and Lowell were not from youth to age devoted to Boston and its history, then there is no virtue in heredity and nurture. Emerson was a pupil of the Boston Latin School. Emerson, Holmes, and Lowell were all graduates of Harvard. Longfellow, Holmes, and Lowell were Harvard professors. Lowell lived and died in the Cambridge home where he was born, the house which had been first the home of Thomas Oliver, the obnoxious royalist lieutenant governor, and afterwards of Elbridge Gerry. Craigie House, Longfellow's home from 1836, when he entered upon his Harvard professorship, until his death, was on the same Tory Row, the house which had been built by Col. John Vassall, whose daughter Thomas Oliver married, and which became during the siege of Boston the headquarters of Washington.

"Holmes, born in the 'old gambrel-roofed house' in Cambridge, had three

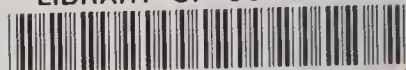
Boston homes,—in Montgomery Place, now Bosworth Street, where he lived for eighteen years, then on the river side of Charles Street, and from 1870 on the river side of Beacon Street.

“Emerson, born on Summer Street, where is now the corner of Chauncy Street, lived afterwards on Beacon Street near the present site of the Boston Athenæum, then within the limits of the present Franklin Park, and, during his ministry at the Second Church, in Chardon Place.

“Whittier’s Boston lodgings, during his eight months here in 1829 as editor of the *Manufacturer*, were with Rev. William Collier, his publisher, at No. 30 Federal Street, where at one time Garrison was his fellow-lodger. While he represented Haverhill in the legislature, Robert Rantoul and he had rooms together for a time at a boarding-place in Franklin Street, by the Bulfinch urn.

“A signal attestation of their deep interest in our local history is afforded by the fact that four of our five poets—and there was equal warrant for the fifth—were members of the Massachusetts Historical Society; and the tributes paid them by their associates in the meetings following their deaths are illuminating and memorable as concerns this side of their activities. It chanced that at all these meetings the venerable George E. Ellis presided, at the first two in Mr. Winthrop’s absence, at the last two as president of the society; and his own remarks on all of these occasions were noteworthy. He recalled the special meeting to which Longfellow invited the society at his own home, as Washington’s headquarters, on June 17, 1858. ‘Few of our associates,’ he said, ‘can have studied our local and even national history more sedulously than did Mr. Longfellow. He took the saddest of our New England tragedies and the sweetest of its rural home scenes, the wayside inn, the alarum of war, the Indian legend, and the hanging of the crane in the modest household, and his genius has invested them with enduring charms and morals. He has, indeed, used freely the poet’s license in playful freedom with dates and facts. But the scenes and incidents and personages which most need a softening and refining touch receive it from him without prejudice to the service to sober history.’ He recalled at the Emerson memorial meeting the impressive scene when, fifteen months before, Emerson, appearing there for the last time, had read his tribute to Carlyle. Of Holmes he remembered that his last presence with the society was when he read his noble tribute to Francis Parkman. Holmes himself was one of the speakers at both the Longfellow and Emerson meetings, and his words on both occasions were the most important which were uttered. Lowell was appointed by the society to prepare the memoir of Longfellow, and accepted the task, but was compelled by pressing new duties to surrender it to other hands. Of Lowell himself Charles Francis Adams said at the meeting following his death, ‘No one among us all had such a nice and subtle appreciation as he of the lights and shadows of New England life, or the varied phases of New England character.’

“Our five Boston poets have not only painted each other’s portraits for us, but there are few Boston men who have achieved things worth achieving in the last two generations whose spiritual lineaments are not perpetuated in their pages. Channing, Webster, Everett, Sumner, Hawthorne, Motley, Agassiz, Garrison, Phillips, Andrew,—these are but the most illustrious of the illustrious company commemorated in verses dear not alone to the Bostonian, but to every American.



"To the student of the history of art there are few rooms in the Uffizi Gallery more impressive than those whose walls are hung with the rich collection of portraits of the world's great painters, painted by themselves. To the student of English history there are few places in London more illuminating than the National Portrait Gallery. We are debtors to our Boston poets for creating for us a Boston Portrait Gallery, in which their own characters and purposes and those of their renowned contemporaries in the Boston of the nineteenth century are depicted in the sharpest, truest, and most imperishable lines. Through our poets the actors in our history are given an immortal vitality, and every pregnant epoch and incident in our history from the beginning is glorified.

"Our poets not only chronicled and transfigured our history: they all in their time helped greatly to make our history, and that precisely in those lines of it which are, in Emerson's words, 'inextricably national, part of the history of liberty.' They wove themselves into our history in the momentous period in which their lives were cast, and their burning verses are a cardinal part of the authentic record. I like to say that, if we could rear in Boston two monuments upon which, about the central figures of Samuel Adams and William Lloyd Garrison, should be grouped the Boston leaders in the struggles which gave America her independence and freed her from slavery, we should have there commemorated an imposing portion of what was most dynamic in those two chief chapters of our national history. In the illustrious anti-slavery group, Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell would all have place."

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